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***“The world is out to get me, Bruv”*: Life after school ‘exclusion’**

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Abstract

Increasingly, punitive policies on ‘problematic’ pupils are implemented in poor-performing UK urban state schools. While some are permanently excluded and referred to local authority educational alternatives, others are unofficially ‘excluded’ and referred to other forms of off-site educational provision. Here pupils receive a significantly reduced timetable, undertake unchallenging courses and are unlikely to return to school. Based on ethnographic fieldwork with 20 excluded young people in one south London borough, this paper will discuss what happens to these young people after their ‘exclusion’ from school. I will suggest that this form of unofficial ‘exclusion’ has significant life implications for these young people, contributing not only to their social exclusion but also increased exposure to crime and victimisation. Moreover, their life options are truncated despite their efforts they may make otherwise.

Key words: Urban young people, school ‘exclusion’, off-site educational provision, crime, victimisation.

Introduction

This paper is concerned with examining processes of school 'exclusion', and the apparent underhand processes by which it was undertaken. It will firstly briefly review some of the key policy debates around urban youth and school exclusion and off-site educational education. Some attention will then be given to the project's aims and methods. The findings will examine the process of school 'exclusion', experiences of off-site educational provision and its implications for these young people.

Current policy debates

Schools are envisaged as playing a key role in the current government's policy to promote social inclusion among children and young people in particular and tackling social exclusion (Tett et al., 2001). Yet while the primary emphasis is social inclusion, greater weight has been given toward punitive school measures to deal with 'problematic' pupils (Ofsted, 1996; Osler and Starkey, 2005). This is particularly the case in inner-city urban schools which suffer from poor attendance, high truancy and exclusion rates (Raffaele et al., 2002; Lupton, 2004; Bruns et al., 2005; Cohen and Angeles, 2006), and a high turnover rate of teachers (Kitching, 2001; Brown, 2004). Despite massive investments to resolve these issues through Education Action Zones, Sure Start, Educational Maintenance Allowances (DfES 2003; Raffo and Gunter, 2008), there is little evidence of improvements in school attendance and truancy levels (Reid, 2010).

School exclusion and urban youth

Rates of school exclusion have been increasing in the UK since the 1988 Education Act was introduced when mainstream school performance league tables were introduced (McIntyre-Bhatty, 2008). Funding and targeting of resources became linked to the ranking of schools which meant schools came under increasing pressure to focus on more 'able students' rather than the specific needs of 'difficult pupils' (Kinder et al., 1999). Many schools were labelled as failing and large numbers of young people were excluded (Osler and Starkey, 2005). Despite recent legislative changes to clarify school exclusion procedures (Berridge et al., 2001), there remain some grey areas; in particular to the use of 'unofficial' exclusions (Stirling, 1992; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Brodie, 1999) whereby schools discourage students from returning to a school or encourage parents to remove their children. Official guidance states that this practice is unacceptable, but it continues to take place with damaging long-term consequences for pupils and their families (Brodie, 1999).

Some groups of young people are disproportionately more likely to experience exclusion than others (McCluskey, 2008): those from poor families, children with learning difficulties, children in care of a Local Authority, minority ethnic pupils, school age mothers, low educational achievement and living in urban areas (DfEE, 1999; Martin et al, 1999; HMI, 2001; Wacquant, 2001; Modood 2004; Christian, 2005). Unsurprisingly, the experience of state secondary schools in disadvantaged urban areas has been distinctly negative (Kinder et al., 1999). Briggs (2009) has shown how, for some, the experience was described as 'frustrating' and boring, most becoming victims of crime, and experienced demonization and discrimination from peers and teachers. Because of this they felt that institutional routes to 'success' were not available to them (also see Majors, 2001; Christian, 2005; Pitts, 2007; Briggs et al., 2007). Other research points to confrontational relationships with teachers, discipline problems, poor facility in English, difficulties with cultural adaptation, truancy, racism and poorly resourced schools which lead to high exclusion rates (Majors, 2001; Milbourne, 2002; Modood, 2003; Dwyer et al. 2006).

Off-site educational provision

According to the DfCSF (2008), 135,000 pupils spend time in alternative educational provision annually; many left without adequate educational provision (Collison, 1996). Although the function of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are to integrate excluded pupils back into mainstream education, because of their past misdemeanours some suggest there is little motivation to bring these pupils back to school which causes a backlog of pupils within alternative provision (Atkinson et al., 2004). Reintegration is also hindered by communicative problems between the school and off-site providers (Kitching, 2001). There also appears to be a stigma attached to alternative provision because it is perceived to have secondary status within the education system, perhaps aptly reflected in the reduced curriculum:

The type of provision made at a PRUs need not be the whole of the national curriculum but should match the needs of local pupils effectively...should offer a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum (DfES, 2007: 34).

In many cases, local authorities are left with no alternative but to offer this provision which overlaps between the key stages 1 and 2. For some, this 'key stage' crossover leaves pupils frustrated at a lack of challenging work and increases the propensity for poor attendance and poor performance (Kinder et al., 1999; Atkinson et al., 2004). Nevertheless pupils end up there because permanently excluded pupils still require funding from the individual school budget which can be double the cost per pupil of a

mainstream education (Kinder et al., 1999). There is, however, no substantial cost for the school to refer young people to off-site educational provision.

The consequences

The consequences of school exclusion result in a lack of education, heightened family stress, social exclusion, and fewer opportunities to acquire skills and qualifications required in the labour market (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Berridge et al., 2001; Osler et al., 2002; Berridge, 2006; Pritchard and Williams, 2009). Research in London has shown that a pupil disaffected or 'excluded' from the school system is more likely to seek support from peers (Pitts, 2007; Briggs et al., 2007) which increasingly takes place within a framework of an urban 'street culture' (see Briggs, 2008; Briggs, 2009 for full description). These social and cultural conditions play an important part in shaping urban young peoples attitudes, their perceptions of the social world and, more importantly, what it can offer them. There is considerable pressure to adopt the norms of the 'street culture' (Sewell 1997), which is often augmented by the prestige given to unruly and antagonistic behaviour (Strand, 2007). However, with this participation comes increased involvement in crime and victimisation (Pain, 2003; Melrose, 2004, Pitts, 2007; Donoghue, 2008).

Aims of the research

The aims were to examine:

1. The reasons for their behaviour in and out of school, and attitudes to education;
2. The reasons why they have been referred to off-site education provision;
3. Their progress in these provisions.

The research began in March 2009 and concluded in August 2009 in one south London borough.

Methodology

Ethnography was the principle method used. Open-ended qualitative interviews were undertaken with 20 young people excluded from school and various observations were made in off-site educational facilities. Thirteen of the 20 were boys and seven were girls. Participants were aged between 15-16 years old. Around half of these pupils had reasonable attendance records of about 60% at their off-site educational provider while others rarely attended. A few had stopped attending completely.

Interviews were also undertaken with Head teachers and off-site educational providers.

Findings

Context: Experiences of secondary school and new interactions

Many performed well early in their secondary school career. However, from around year 8 onwards most seemed to start to develop 'attitude problems'. These were uniform misdemeanours, 'backchatting', disrupting other pupils, aggressive or intimidating behaviour, and refusing to follow instructions/lesson plans. These interactions appeared to be a response to three main situational problems in class actioned: 1. when pupils were not clear on their learning; 2. when pupils felt their voice or opinion was disregarded or worthless by teachers; and 3. when pupils felt stigmatised by other pupils or teachers.

These interactions also appeared to be a response to a wider set of tense social exchanges with teachers in and around school. Pupils reflected that many teachers held disregard for their appearance, tone of voice, and body language. The teachers' responses were often strict and dismissive in an attempt to uphold the rules. Unfortunately, given that the bulk of this group had grown up in and/or were interacting with an urban street culture (see Briggs, 2008; Briggs 2009) where interaction with adults did not necessarily respect authority well, many problems merely escalated between teachers and pupils – to the point where both parties showed visible signs of aggression. This was because young people did not want to be disrespected among their peers because this was not part of the social code of conduct which most had developed through interacting with their peers.

By year 9, pupil/teacher relations deteriorated significantly and there were more accounts of detentions. Many felt the punishments were not effective and many could not understand how their harsh treatment was on a par with others who had committed more serious acts in school. If and when they did get to class, mobile phones and the internet were constant distractions. Others just stopped attending. Many of these problems did not come to light with parents as many pupils curtailed contact between their family and the school. There was little to motivate pupils when they started to realise that they had to work harder to catch up. It didn't take long for a pupil who had located the excitement of being out of school, with peers, to get frustrated with their waning motivation or reduced capacity to concentrate on their work. However, the full consequences of their actions were unknown: largely

because both parents and the school were often unaware of the extent to which problems were developing.

By now, many had developed significantly skewed time frameworks which were not conducive to school attendance; that is, late nights and late mornings resulting from 'jammin ends' (hanging around on the streets or parks) with friends, playing X-box, and/or smoking cannabis. This easily cancelled out any motivation to attend the subjects they were finding difficult and those where relations with teachers were strained. It was often at this stage that problems culminated in 'exclusion' and referral to off-site educational provision. This sets some context for the paper. There now follows an examination of their 'exclusion' and referral to off-site educational provider, their experience in these provisions and their involvement in crime.

'Exclusion' and referral to off-site educational provider

It was apparent from interviews with Heads that pupils simply 'had not done enough' to be permanently excluded. This is an important shift because earlier research shows that permanent exclusion tended to result from this kind of behaviour – disruptive behaviour, violence in school or involvement in crime (Ofsted, 1996; Berridge et al., 2001). What this research shows is that the reasons for unofficial 'exclusion' tended not to hinge on drastic or violent events but more persistent misdemeanours, over time:

It was like they build it up [the things you do wrong]. At the end of year 9, the last two weeks and they told me that I am not coming back. [Dan: No warning?]. No. [Remi]

Heads said the schools would have already explored 'all avenues' with parents, and 'exclusion' and referrals to off-site educational provision were the 'last resort'. However, some Heads reflected that high permanent exclusion rates would affect the perception and perhaps the league position of the school. They also said that the reason off-site educational providers were used was because there were waiting lists to attend a local authority college – where all permanently excluded pupils were referred. However, on discussion with various representatives from this college, there were no such waiting lists. None of the pupils were aware they were 'still on the school books' and were unaware of their legal rights:

Leo: Mum had to go to school meeting before the summer holidays but they didn't want to send me to [local authority funded provision]. I wasn't sure if I

was permanently excluded. They just sent me a letter in the holidays about [name], then I came here [to centre] and started after the holidays. They suspended me for six weeks, then after I came back I didn't change much and then they had a meeting with my mum, they told me why I was excluded, it said permanently excluded but I didn't go to the college.

Dan: *Why?*

Leo: *Too many bad boys.*

Dan: *And the appeal process?*

Leo: *Mum didn't look into the appeal process, I just got told to go to centre.*

One head indicated that many schools “*didn't follow the full process; of sending letters, governor meetings, and through right of appeal*” because of a lack of knowledge about the Education Act. It was quite clear, however, that these processes were removing young people from schools without a legal process. For example, a key feature of referral to off-site provision was that it was temporary; for a set time before reintegration was made back to school for the duration of year 10 and 11. However, these processes were not honoured by schools in this research:

Mike: *They said they were 'excluding me for a little while' then I had a meeting with them and they said I was coming here for six weeks or something like that.*

Dan: *At the end of year 9?*

Mike: *Yeah, then I am here thinking I am going back to school, then they came saying I was not allowed back in the school. I was like 'forget you, I ain't bothered'.*

In fact, a significant proportion of those interviewed appeared to have been referred conveniently at the end of year 9 before the advent of their GCSE years. Heads said this was because their academic capabilities were out of sync with what was expected with the advent of key stage 4. The safest decision therefore, which appeared to be made on behalf of the school and less on behalf of the pupil or their family, was for them to receive ‘alternative education’ in an off-site facility. This made most feel inadequate and inferior:

Dan: *When did they say you were being 'excluded' as you say?*

Adam: *I don't know too much about that, you know. I did know they said that I would be going to [name], some NVQ thing in college so we went there to do the taster and select what we wanted and I thought 'I won't be doing GCSEs' but I thought to myself 'what is going on here'. It wasn't just me, it was other people.*

Dan: *Were these people considered 'problematic'?*

Adam: *Yeah, some of them. I didn't want to be in it so I don't want to not do my GCSEs like everyone else. If you come to a job and they see that you have no GCSEs what would you think?*

Dan: *I see your point.*

Adam: *They told my mum and that I was going to another programme and they offered me here or College because I heard that here you could do your GCSEs so I wanted to do them so that [but this was not possible]. I want to feel like a proper student because GNVQ does not sound proper.*

However, when they were excluded, many had already developed disorganised routines, had developed difficult relationships with their families, were spending more time on the streets with peers and many were unsure how next to proceed.

Experiences of and progress in off-site educational providers

For a significant number, engaging with off-site educational provision proved to be difficult because many already had skewed time frameworks: lifestyles which were augmented by potentially long distances to travel, unchallenging courses, and the pressure from others whom also had fragile commitment levels, to 'skip class or leave at lunch':

Like it started well but then I did the same thing, started going in late [to centre], not turning up, leaving at lunch [with others]. I was alright then I was bored of it, like too easy, like then I was running out with other people who was there because they were bad people as well. [Maria]

For staff in these agencies, the persistence needed to constantly phone and chase up young people was clearly tiring. In these field notes recorded from one visit, my arrival seemed to trigger the mid-morning 'phone around'. On this particular day, of the twelve who should have been present at 10am, only five had arrived at 11am:

One can see, when faced with repeated responses like 'I'm on my way' or 'the bus has problems', how frustrating it can be for staff. After not getting through on the phone to some pupils, large efforts were made to leave non-judgemental messages asking for their whereabouts and expected arrival time but they were visibly tired of making these calls. The frustration continued, however, when the worker started to call parents [the next step in the protocol], even their responses appeared to be quite laissez-faire: 'I told her to go' and 'he'll probably be there in 20 minutes' were mimed to me while the worker's head started to shake in despair. [1.7.09]

Despite most having sporadic attendance levels, most reflected it was 'better than school'. However, this was often for the wrong reasons in that, in some provisions, they could use their mobile phone, wear what they liked, play games, and in some programmes, come and go or not turn up without repercussions:

Peter: *They are stricter [than school].*

Dan: *What do they do if you don't turn up?*

Peter: *They exclude you for three days but if you leave at lunchtime they exclude you for three weeks and tell you 'it's your loss to your education'. If you are disrespectful, they will exclude you as well.*

Yet later in the interview, after revealing his late-night habits such as smoking cannabis and playing X-Box, he said:

Peter: *Sometimes I wake up late or stay in bed all day, probably on the phone and miss centre but all they do is exclude you for a few days.*

Dan: *And you'll take that [you don't mind if that happens].*

Peter: *Yeah, because I know I am going back.*

Some did not attend for anything from a few hours, to a few days to several weeks. While some programme workers had insisted in some informal conversations that they 'followed up' these students, on asking 'what happened to some pupils' some workers did not seem to know much and tended to merely accept the absence as a 'lifestyle choice'. There was also poor communication between schools and off-site providers, which jeopardised the role of responsibility for attendance and follow-up visits. Only one of the twenty pupils said that "some visits" were made on his progress to determine whether he could return to school. He, however, did not return. Moreover, the casual atmosphere in some provisions, while concurrent with the young people's lifestyles and dress codes, did not appear to offer formalised learning systems which would be beneficial to them:

Robert: *That is my classroom out there.*

[Points to the hall where classes take place]

Robert: *That ain't no classroom.*

Dan: *So you feel like you are not being educated?*

Robert: *Yeah, but I heard they are closing this place down in June or July. So there is nothing you can do about it. It doesn't make you feel hopeful, like for what you are doing [for the future].*

In this way, such informal settings did not seem to invoke high levels of commitment. Here my field notes recorded my initial experiences of another learning environment:

I turned up around 11.30am, and outside there were a few girls smoking. One was Dinah who I was there to meet. She was trying to suck as much out of the cigarette as possible and her friend was trying to persuade her to give up – maybe because, as I later discovered, she was pregnant. We went inside and waited around to be let in – there didn't appear to be anyone around of authority but when we finally went in and a lady showed us into the main hall where a young man was slowly getting out the tables. It was a community hall, with some chairs randomly placed in the room. There appeared to be little order. Another pair were playing chess in the corner. Another was listening to loud music on his mobile. It looked a little haphazard and disorganised. A table was set up for us in the corner for us to do the interview

but there was too much noise in the room – one young chap started banging tables around so we moved to the reception area which was more public. Dinah seemed to be quite aggressive to the lady in charge but the lady seemed unmoved by her attitude and slowly walked off. Throughout the time in the reception, young people seem to drift in and out to smoke, talk on their mobiles and generally ‘hang around’. I was later to learn that in afternoon, they were to sit a GCSE exam in maths. [15.5.09]

But then again, her relationship with staff had been damaged because they had publically discussed her pregnancy in front of staff and other young people. This reduced the respect she had for them, and, at times, also contributed to her reduced attendance on the programme:

Like I have fallen pregnant and they told the students, and they are discussing it among themselves and I am like ‘that is unprofessional’ and that is not their business. Even though I didn’t like them but I came here and there but after that I was so angry. I don’t really talk to them now.

Nevertheless, there were a few were motivated to try to return to school. Junior was initially positive about his referral to centre: *“It was a good place to go, like we have fun and learn – I got on well with teachers and they get on well with us. I used to be the best-attended pupil. I had certificates and everything.”* He saw the referral as a chance to get back into school since he had been told that this was possible:

[School] were saying ‘stay there for two weeks and we’ll get you back into school’. My performance in [off-site provider] was brilliant. I went every day. But every time I kept asking them ‘can I go back’, I couldn’t.

He didn’t either. After several requests to return on the grounds of improved behaviour and attendance, his commitment started to waiver but it was not until after a year and a half of being in the provision did he started to question ‘what he was working towards’. This was marked by his immediate self-withdrawal from the programme since it was not only the school had made promises but also the centre who had lead him to believe he would return to school:

I didn’t want to go centre. It was easy, I used to be top student but I left. I was there for like one year and a half. I left in January just gone. Like I found out in January that I could not get anything and I thought ‘I’m not staying here for nothing, no qualifications.’

In fact, many pupils had been told they could take GCSEs and were under the illusion these exams were ‘coming up’. Yet this was not the case because not only

had the time period for GCSEs passed but none realised that they could not take the exams in the off-site provider:

They [pupils] may choose GCSE subjects but they can't do the exams [in off-site providers]. What you can have is a service provider can approach a school and use them as a test centre but the school pays for the exams. It's not much but the provider does not really prepare them for GCSEs so in the terms the kids don't get much. [School liaison officer]

In addition, the drop in number of days required to attend an off-site provision (in comparison to school – from five days to two or three per week) appeared to impact on attendance levels since it reduced the requirement on the part of the pupil which in turn reduced motivation, and augmented already irregular routines. Similarly, Cameron reflected how he wanted to do his GCSEs and that his current timetable was not promoting effective learning. He said he had large gaps between lessons:

Cameron: *I was only at centre two days a week.*

Dan: *What do you do between that?*

Cameron: *Stay at home.*

Dan: *And do what?*

Cameron: *Go round, do nothing. I was angry.*

[Long pause]

Similarly, as with school, most pupils continued to avoid the key subjects in which they had poor ability. However, the majority of the core courses in these provisions revolved around these key subjects such as maths, English, or science. Robert did not turn up “some Mondays” because maths and English were “boring.” He reflected that ‘centre’ had offered him “something”, that ‘something’ was marked by little awareness of what he actually accomplished on a week-to-week basis:

Robert: *It's a good place, if it weren't for here, I would be on the road. It has given me something to do rather than be at school.*

Dan: *Yes, but what exactly do you do here?*

Robert: *Work. Monday maths and English but I don't come much. Tuesday gym, that's ok I suppose. Wednesday we have [pause] can't remember. Thursday cooking which ain't that good and Friday is relationships and sex talks for half day then the rest of the day we have off.*

The increased spare time spent out of mainstream education meant they were often at the mercy of peer influences and, more significantly, spent more time in situations in which crime and victimisation could occur.

Exposure to crime and victimisation

A few in the sample had been involved in crime throughout their secondary school years. Robert and Peter were both involved with gangs from the age of 11. They recalled being involved in petty crime, largely to do with robbery or/and theft. The more they drifted into this lifestyle early in secondary school the more attendance suffered. Nevertheless, the vast majority of pupils were not involved in crime during their time in secondary school. Prior to school exclusion, only Robert and Peter had been involved with criminal justice agencies but post-exclusion, seven others had come into contact with the criminal justice system.

Tony, who had never had contact with the police, found that he was frequently *“stopped and searched when missing school”* when with friends. In the five months since leaving off-site provision, Junior had got *“into trouble with police for robbery.”* He now had a *“year’s probation”* and wanted to stay on *“the straight and narrow.”* Dominic was kicked out of school at 14 and was robbing with a gang from Catford: *“I was 15 when I was arrested and just thought it’s ‘just not worth it’ – I learnt from that. Now I only go places now where I need to go.”* Cameron had recently been in trouble with the police and had a pending court case for breaking and entering. He felt it was taken out of context, and in the process of arrest, he was also *“accused of assaulting a police officer.”* This made him angrier: *“the world is out to get me bruv”*.

For many, these increased interactions also meant increased exposure to territorial gang boundaries which, for a few, had not only affected attendance at school and but for most was now affecting attendance at all forms of welfare provision:

When I go to the Youth Offending Team, you get beef with people who also go to Youth Offending Team. The Youth Offending Team is in Lewisham and that is a no zone for me. Sometimes I get dropped off there [by his father]. I have missed appointments for that but also community service in Sydenham but they [the Youth Offending Team] don’t understand there is beef with people and I am at risk. [Peter]

Some reflected on having to travel out of their area which enhanced the chances of potential violent confrontations and increased the chances of victimisation: *“like sometimes I have had hassle from people outside centre which can deter you or on the buses [Cameron].”*

Discussion

This paper has shown that, in a climate of pressure on inner-city urban schools to achieve (Osler and Starkey, 2005), a mixture of subtle and blatant social exclusion processes appeared to have severely damaged these young peoples chances of an education and reduced their capacity in the labour market. Their 'unofficial' exclusion appears to be some attempt by schools to uphold the rules and standards of education because these 'problematic' pupils may have affected their league table status (McIntyre-Bhatty, 2008). But this is not a new phenomenon (Brodie, 1999; Berridge et al., 2001) and their exclusion seems to point toward money-saving measures on behalf of schools so that funding their education did not drain their coffers.

This seems odd because many of these young people do not fit the profile of 'excluded' young people in that very few had 'issues at home', they were not necessarily from a disadvantaged family or area nor criminally active throughout their time at secondary school. Most were, however, demonised by peers and pupils, experienced discrimination and were not offered help with weak subjects (Majors, 2001; Christian, 2005; Pitts, 2007; Briggs et al., 2007; Briggs, 2009). Most lost interest, 'played up in class' and became disaffected, preferring to tap into the urban street culture by 'jammin ends', listening to music, go on 'road', play X-Box or smoke cannabis. While a few were clearly exposed to this urban street culture from a young age, and this had some bearing on the secondary school performance, it was this socio-cultural backdrop which became more prominent for most as life in mainstream school eroded (Pitts, 2007).

When they were 'excluded', they were confused at the reasons why, the implications and what they would be working towards and it's educational worth. Many felt angry this appeared to carry over into other areas of their lives. Parents also had little idea about the process and were unaware of their rights. Tokenistic attempts were made to re-integrate them back into school, while they were left to navigate themselves through the bureaucratic and disorganised nature of the educational alternatives. But without support and direction, many did not know how to progress. So by the time some started off-site educational provision, their out-of-sync lifestyles and skewed learning attitudes were already well-established; lifestyles which were augmented by potentially long distances to travel, unchallenging courses, potential meetings with gang adversaries and the pressure from others, who also had fragile commitment levels, to 'skip class or leave at lunch'. Taken together, this appeared to have laid the

foundations for most to be more vulnerable to social exclusion, crime and victimisation (see Briggs, 2008; Briggs, 2009).

Conclusion: A consideration of urban street culture

These social exclusion processes appeared to have dented these young peoples' life chances because as the possibilities of returning to school disappeared, an increased investment was made into disorganised routines and an urban street culture. This laid poor foundations for their referral to off-site educational provision where they found similar learning problems in key subjects and unchallenging courses which were not attached to GCSE examination. To avoid this, there needs to be more proactive monitoring of young peoples' performance in secondary school and the methods by which schools work with both families and off-site educational providers to ensure these issues are resolved before alternatives are considered.

Additionally while this paper has examined the process by which pupils are unofficially excluded from school and their subsequent experiences, it is perhaps of equal worth to consider the urban street culture and the centrality it plays in young peoples' lives. This is because both the structural inequities of education policy and individual difficulties in education appear to be complemented by this culture which offers sanctuary when other aspects of direction and life meaning appear to be weakening or even disappearing. It is this culture which needs greater consideration in the formation of school policy which must accommodate it rather than seek to eradicate it because this will only result in more socially excluded young people.

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